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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 000103

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: GOJ MOVES TO RETURN AMBASSADOR TO TEL AVIV

REF: AMMAN 00044

Classified By: CDA David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) Summary. The King has instructed his government to return an Ambassador to Tel Aviv, and the Israeli Ambassador here - usually a glass half empty man - is modestly optimistic that a way can be found to save the Jordanian government's "face" with a modest release of Jordanian prisoners, now that Jordan has dropped its insistence that four men convicted of pre-treaty terrorist murders be included. The arrangements may not be made in time for a visit by Silvan Shalom, penciled in for January 12 - the timing of which Israeli diplomats say privately is driven by Shalom's vanity. End summary.

2. (C) Royal Court Minister Samir Rifai told CDA on January 4 that King Abdullah, after his December trip to Washington, directed that Jordan's ambassador to Tel Aviv be returned as soon as practicable after the January 9 Palestinian elections, and certainly within the month of January. The onus was on the government to figure out how to get out of what Rifai readily described as "the box Jordan had put itself" in by linking the return to impossible demands related to the release of four Jordanian prisoners held by Israel for pre-peace treaty terrorist murders. As reported reftel, Foreign Minister al-Mulki has been searching for a face saving-way to do so, and dropped the demand related to the four.

3. (C) Israeli Ambassador Yacov Handelsman confirmed to CDA on January 5 that in line with press reports, Israel was working with the GOJ to prepare for a visit by Foreign Minister Shalom to Amman next week. Handelsman said that the GOI was "definitely prepared to do something" on the release of some other Jordanian prisoners now that the GOJ had shown some flexibility. Handelsman noted, however, that legal, political and procedural obstacles could prevent movement on the prisoner issue in time for Shalom's proposed visit to Jordan, which the Israeli DCM (protect) characterized as driven more by Shalom's concern that DPM Olmert's visit to Amman last week upstaged him in his self-perceived role as the manager of Jordan-Israel relations. A Jordanian MFA spokesman told the press January 3 that al-Mulki had informed Shalom that "the Israeli government must take an initiative that would facilitate the visit and guarantee its success by releasing Jordanian prisoners."

HALE